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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2937
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2200

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 000129

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MTS - M. COPPOLA
NEW DELHI FOR J. EHRENDREICH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [SN](#)
SUBJECT: BURMESE COMMUNITY LYING LOW AS SINGAPORE EXPELS
MORE LEADERS

REF: A. 08 SINGAPORE 894
[1](#)B. 08 SINGAPORE 1112

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel Shields for reason 1.4(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Burmese activists in Singapore have temporarily abandoned public protests against the Burmese junta, according to Burmese contacts. Over the past year, several leaders of 2007's anti-junta protests had to leave Singapore after the GOS refused to renew their permanent resident status or work permits. Nevertheless, activists hope to stage further protest rallies in Singapore this year in connection with Burma's planned 2010 election. A pair of Singaporean activists protested their government's expulsion of two long-time Burmese residents. Contacts indicate that the police are watching Burmese activists carefully. End summary.

Singapore Selectively Expels Burmese Activists

[1](#)2. (C) Support for the Overseas Burmese Patriots group - founded in November 2007 in response to the Burmese junta's crackdown that year - has dwindled as some of its leaders have been obliged to leave Singapore, two Burmese contacts told Poloffs recently. Four of the group's original members departed in 2008 because the GOS declined to renew their permanent resident (PR) status or work permits, according to university student and leading Burmese activist Myo Myint Maung. Two additional OBP members, Moe Kyaw Thu and Win Kyaw, each of whom had lived and worked in Singapore for more than 10 years, had to leave in January 2009 when the Ministry of Manpower did not renew their work permits. The nonrenewals appear to be targeted, because several other OBP members successfully renewed their PR status in late 2008. Singapore's Burmese have reacted to the departures by staying quiet, said Maung and Dr. Vernetta Myint Myint Sann, a Burmese physician long resident in Singapore. OBP's core membership has dropped from 20 in 2007 to fewer than nine today, and many Burmese with PR status have dissociated themselves from the group, Maung added.

Singapore: Burmese Protesters "Not Welcome"

[1](#)3. (C) The GOS does not comment on the reasons for individual immigration decisions, but it makes no secret of its views about OBP leaders. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Wong Kan Seng told Parliament in September 2008 that the group "persistently defied our laws in pursuing their political agenda" and that immigration authorities "rightly decided that such persons are undesirable and that they should leave." Singapore has not charged or tried any OBP activist for breaking Singapore law. In January 2009, responding to publicity about the Ministry

of Manpower's refusal to renew the work permits of Moe Kyaw Thu and Win Kyaw, the Ministries of Home Affairs and Manpower issued a joint statement that "these persons are not welcomed in Singapore" and "they are free to leave for any country of their choice or any country which will have them." Maung and Sann told Poloffs that several of the departing Burmese have obtained or are applying for refugee status through UNHCR in Indonesia or Cambodia, and they reported that none was obliged to return to Burma.

Burma Activism Not Completely Squelched

¶4. (C) Despite the winnowing of OBP ranks and the organization's circumspection over the past several months, the Burmese and their supporters continue to look for ways to oppose the junta and engage with Singaporeans. Maung said OBP hopes to stage further protest rallies later this year in connection with Burma's planned 2010 elections. Meanwhile, Maung and Sann said, "silent activists" here continue to send financial support to opposition groups within Burma. In January, police charged two young Singaporean activists, Seelan Palay and Chong Kai Xiong, with criminal trespass for staging a public protest at the Ministry of Manpower over the Moe Kyaw Thu and Win Kyaw cases. Palay and Chong are free on bail while those charges are pending.

Activists Claim Police Are Watching Them

¶5. (C) Maung recounted a 2008 incident to illustrate for Poloffs that the GOS is watching Burmese activists closely.

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A one-room Burmese lending library and de facto community center operates in a shopping mall known colloquially as "Little Burma." OBP, which sometimes uses the premises to organize activities, taped a poster in a library window facing out toward the shopping mall. The poster called attention to human rights violations in Burma in the context of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Singapore police contacted the library's Singaporean landlord and summoned him to the mall after hours. They obtained his permission to search the premises, tore down the poster, and left it lying on the floor. Maung said he did not know how the police learned about the poster.

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